

SUNDAY *to* SUNDAY

FACT OF FAITH CATECHUMENS

by Fr. Larry Rice

This Lent, in many Catholic parishes, you may see people preparing for Baptism and initiation into the Church. These people, called catechumens, are on a journey of spiritual growth. The Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults is the formal process that guides that journey, and during Lent, there are particular markers along that road.

On some of the Sundays of Lent, the catechumens are presented with the Lord's Prayer and the Creed. They are also asked to publicly give witness to their desire for full communion with the Church, through rites that have the somewhat intimidating name of "scrutinies." These scrutinies usually happen at a Sunday Mass in front of the assembled congregation.

It may seem odd, but the catechumens are usually dismissed from the Mass after the homily. Since they don't yet participate in the celebration of the Eucharist, they are dismissed to study the Word of God and to continue their preparation for Baptism and initiation.



In most places, the catechumens will be received into the Church during the Easter Vigil. Because they are becoming Catholic as adults, they generally receive all of the Sacraments of Initiation at once: they are baptized, confirmed, and receive their first Eucharist at the Easter Vigil.

Through this process, people are welcomed into the community of believers, and the Church itself is renewed.

MERCY RESOURCE SHOWING LOVE AND DIGNITY FOR OTHERS, EVEN IN DEATH

by Daniel S. Mulhall

Of the seven corporal works of mercy, only one is not found in Matthew 25:31-46: bury the dead. Why then is it included as one of the works of mercy?

Proper burial of the dead was an important practice in Israel from its earliest days. A common practice was to prepare the body for burial with ointments and spices and then to wrap the body in a linen cloth before laying it in a tomb, as was done with Jesus (Jn 19:40).

There the body would decay until only bones remained, and then they would be moved to a permanent burial place where they would be placed with the bones of one's ancestors.

According to Luke 23:53, Jesus was wrapped in linen and laid in a "rock-hewn tomb in which no one had yet been buried," but because of the Sabbath, his body had not yet been anointed with the appropriate spices and perfumed oil.

Thus the women returned early in the morning on the first day of the week to finish the burial ritual, only to find the tomb empty.

The importance of proper burial can be seen in Genesis 23 when Abraham, who is then living among the Hittites, purchases a field in which to bury his wife Sarah. Genesis 49:31 informs us that Abraham will also be buried in that tomb, as will Isaac and his wives, Leah and Rebekah, and their son, Jacob.

The importance of a proper burial is also seen in the internment of Joshua and the bones of Joseph (Jos 24:29-33).

Proper burial of the dead was considered so important in Israel that being left unburied was considered a curse and a condemnation.

In Deuteronomy 28:26, where all the curses for disobeying God's commands are listed, this curse is found: "Your corpses will become food for all the birds of the air and for the beasts of the field, with no one to frighten them off."

Not to bury someone properly then was a sign of great disrespect and a condemnation.

According to the Book of Tobit, burying the dead was an important work of charity: "I had performed many charitable deeds for my kindred, . . . I would give my bread to the hungry and clothing to the naked. If I saw one of my people who died and been thrown behind the wall of Nineveh, I used to bury him" (Tb 1:16-17).

As with all of the works of mercy, what is emphasized here is the importance of compassion for others and the need to treat everyone with the dignity and respect they deserve as people created by a loving God.

Showing love for others, even after death, is how Jesus' disciples are to show their love for God.

"May St. Joseph
bless you and
accompany you."

—Pope Francis
March 19, 2014

